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ABSTRACT

The COPE (Cooperative Organization for Program Excellence) program in Newport News, Virginia, is designed to bridge the gap between academic theory and practical application for teachers new to the field of special education. The program uses peers as support partners to help new teachers set up classroom programs and organizations, fulfill Individualized Education Program requirements, share materials, and respond to problems and questions of teaching. Master teachers are identified for each level of instruction (elementary, middle school, and high school), and an evaluation design incorporates feedback from participating teachers, team members, and program coordinators. Sample letters to beginning teachers and their principals are appended along with evaluation forms and the list of duties of peer partners. (CL)

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Newport News Public Schools
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INSERVICE TRAINING MODEL FOR BEGINNING NEWPORT NEWS PUBLIC SCHOOLS SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

Cooperative Organization for Program Excellence (COPE)

Too often beginning teachers come to public school settings having had practicum experiences in predesigned clinical-like settings. Generally, the level of training is not of sufficient quality and extent to enable these teachers to perform the much broader range of responsibilities required by the presence of both handicapped and nonhandicapped students in a public school setting.

Additionally, experienced teachers new to Newport News Public Schools come from school divisions whose requirements may have been somewhat different from those viewed necessary here.

Much more effort through a strong inservice program is needed to assist both new and experienced teachers toward an early professional and social assimilation into the system. COPE serves to bridge the gap between academic theory and practical application for teachers new to the field of Special Education and affords support to the experienced professional as he/she adapts valid skills to what is often a new delivery format. Such an inservice model which addresses these needs is presented.

The Cooperative Organization for Program Excellence (COPE) is designed to utilize peers to serve as support partners for these new teachers. Emphasis will be on assisting new teachers to NNPS in synthesizing academic theory into practical experiences and understanding the requirements, both local and federal, of a service delivery. The goals and objectives of the peer partners concept are:

Goals:

1. To provide small units of direct support to new teachers.
2. To extend the expertise of identified teachers who are successful in their instructional skills and mandated responsibilities.
3. To aid in evaluating materials for use on their assigned levels.
4. To identify and select a master teacher on each level of instruction (elementary, middle school, and high schools).

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Objectives:

Peer teachers will work directly with assigned teachers:

1. In setting up classroom programs and organizations which reflect system and department philosophy.

2. In fulfilling IEP requirements as mandated.

3. In being an immediate contact person for assigned teacher when problems, questions, and etc., occur.

4. In sharing materials for use on level which both are teaching.

Personnel:

Special education teachers whose performances have demonstrated skills in planning, implementing, designing creative special education delivery services and in working effective with parents, students, and school personnel will serve as members of the peer team. Team members will serve no more than three years. A stipend for this additional responsibility will be awarded to the identified peer team members.

Implementation:

All beginning teachers to the system will be assigned to the program during their three year probationary period. First year teachers will meet with peer partners no less than one hour per month. Frequency of meetings for second and third year teachers will be determined by peer team members and program coordinators.

Program Evaluation:

An evaluation design will be constructed to provide opportunities for participating teachers, team members and program coordinators to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and to make recommendations for the following year.

This approach is a category of inservice design which is quite different from those approaches we commonly use in inservice programs in special education. The special characteristics of peer involvement, reality problem solving, feedback, and interpretation are brought together in this approach to form a unique sequence of structured experiences for teacher and program coordinator participation. Proper planning, coupled with coordinated and continued effort on the part of the team members, program coordinators and school personnel will make this approach a model that could be replicated in special education and general education.

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LETTER TO BEGINNING TEACHER
PRIOR TO FIRST WEEK OF SCHOOL

Dear _____:

_____ will be calling you this week as your "Peer Partner" in the Department of Special Education this year. A letter will be sent to your principal introducing this program of Cooperative Organization for Program Excellence, COPE, and your Peer Partner's role with you.

I am hopeful that you will find _____ expertise in special education, of system philosophy and his/her ability to deal with the many mandated forms and procedures as helpful as I personally feel it will be. This in no way means y u cannot call on me for direct assistance, but, instead, it does offer you an immediate resource for help which on occasion I might not be able to give.

Sincerely,

Ollie Vee W. Lowe
Department of Special Education

Newport News Public Schools

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LETTER TO PRINCIPAL OF BEGINNING TEACHER

Dear _____:

_____ teacher at _____ has been designated by the Department of Special Education as the Peer Partner for _____.

A list of her duties in that capacity are enclosed. The Department appreciates your support and guidance as building principal but also realizes that many new teachers have concerns which are often unique to the special education delivery. Therefore, the Cooperative Organization for Program Excellence offers the expertise of its Peers Partner to address such needs.

Please continue to contact me at anytime during the year if you have questions concerning this program of support, but also recognize that immediate help for your new special education teacher is also available through still another resource.

Sincerely,

Ollie Vee W. Lowe
Department of Special Education

Newport News Public Schools

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COPY OF DUTIES

TO: Building Principals
Beginning Teachers
Peer Partners

Duties of Peer Partner

1. Meet your teacher at least twice per month to
   - review all IEPs - 83-84 Annual Reviews or new form short term objectives,
   - see that all related service IEPs are attached to IEP,
   - check on form of written IEP.

2. Review schedule for daily teaching to determine if it is
   - appropriate to IEP goals and objectives,
   - including materials and methods appropriate to IEP.

3. Give suggestions for resources and materials.

4. Discuss specific teaching problems.

5. Monitor Marking Period Progress Reports for home/school communication and resource teachers for Conference Day Logs.

6. Assist in home visits when necessary.

7. Specifically look for and review IEPs written from transfer information-transfer IEP attached.

8. Plan to be with teacher for first 2/3 parent conferences.

9. Maintain a logbook for visits, concerns addressed, problems encountered and managed, etc.

10. Maintain rolls of classes and check often for current information on withdrawals, additions, nonattendance, etc.

11. Coordinate any other activities as requested by the Department of Special Education.

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EVALUATION AT END OF SCHOOL YEAR
TO BE COMPLETED BY PEER PARTNER

WOULD YOU PLEASE FILL OUT THE FOLLOWING FORM AND
RETURN IT TO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION OFFICE, OLLIE VEE W. LOWE

Name:

Schools/teachers with whom you have worked:

What do you view as positive elements of the Peer Partner Program?
(Don't be modest!)

What do you view as weaknesses of this Program?

- How can these weaknesses be addressed?

Are there any other ways this Program can be improved?

Are you interested in continuing as a Peer Partner?

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EVALUATION AT END OF SCHOOL YEAR
TO BE COMPLETED BY NEW TEACHER

WOULD YOU PLEASE FILL OUT THE FOLLOWING FORM
AND RETURN IT TO THE SPECIAL EDUCATION OFFICE. THANK YOU.

Name:

Your Peer Partner:

What do you view as positive elements of the Peer Partner Program?

What do you view as weaknesses of this Program?

- How can these weaknesses be addressed in your opinion?

Are there any other ways this Program can be improved?

Any additional comments or suggestions?